

East. Our joint efforts in the war on terrorism, in Afghanistan, and in Iraq, are essential for the security of our people today. Yet over the long term, the growth of freedom is vital to unraveling the nexus of threats posed by terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, tyranny, the lack of opportunity, and violent extremism.

Today, American and Polish soldiers are serving bravely in a just struggle against terrorists and in the international effort to bring peace, security, and freedom to Afghanistan and Iraq. We thank them for their dedication and sacrifice.

We agree on the importance of the rapid reconstruction of a sovereign Iraq with democratic institutions and respecting the rule of law. We welcome the widespread international support for this process, and in particular, recognize the vital and growing role the United Nations should play in these efforts.

Polish-American military cooperation since 1989 has proven its value, and we have agreed to increase this cooperation. Poland is embarking on a comprehensive transformation program to modernize its armed forces, strengthening its ability to respond with the United States to global challenges. The United States supports this program. In particular, we remain committed to the goals of the U.S.-Polish Defense Transformation Initiative, and the United States will provide new assistance to Poland in acquiring C-130 military transport aircraft, which will increase the effectiveness and mobility of Polish capabilities.

We note with satisfaction the growing support worldwide for our shared efforts to implement the Proliferation Security Initiative, announced by President Bush in Krakow in May 2003, and we agree to enhance cooperation in bioterrorist attack prevention in Central and Eastern Europe.

Poland and the United States are growing partners in trade and investment, which will grow even faster as Poland continues to improve its business climate. The sale of U.S. combat-proven fighter aircraft to Poland marks an important opportunity to increase defense industry ties and other forms of industrial cooperation and investment. We welcome the interest of Polish firms in partici-

pating in the reconstruction of Iraq. To facilitate this participation, building on the recent visit of U.S. Commerce Secretary Evans to Poland, the United States will send experts to Poland to provide information on the Iraq reconstruction process and procurement opportunities to Polish firms. In addition, the United States will also establish in Poland a regional center to provide information on an ongoing basis regarding Iraqi reconstruction.

We support contacts between our societies and travel between our countries by our peoples. The United States recognizes that security concerns are imposing inconveniences on legitimate travelers. To improve the ease and safety of such travel, the United States will establish in Warsaw a program to pre-screen visitors traveling from Poland to the United States. We agree to hold regular, High-Level Working Group consultations starting at an early date to discuss ways to enhance travel security and facilitate travel for Polish and American citizens. We look forward as well to enactment of a U.S. temporary worker program that will provide new opportunities to Poles, among others, to work in the United States.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Congressional Leaders

January 27, 2004

Legislative Agenda

I want to thank the Members from the Senate and the House who are here, both Republicans and Democrat leaders who are here to discuss the upcoming session. We've got a lot of common interests this year, interests of continuing to fight and win the war against terror. We need to protect our homeland. We need to put policies in place that help people find work. We'll work together on the health needs of our fellow citizens. We've got to be wise with the people's money. I look forward to constructive conversation today and working together constructively throughout the year. This is an election year. It's a year where people say, "Nothing can get done." We need to prove

them wrong. We need to continue to do the people's business in a sound way.

I want to thank the Members for coming. I appreciate the chance to visit with you, and I look forward to a good relationship here in 2004.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:34 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks on Access to Health Care *January 28, 2004*

The President. Thank you for being here. Please be seated. Thanks for coming. If you're wondering who these characters are behind me, these are people who have just shared their stories about what it means to be an employer or employee and facing rising costs of health care. The cost of health care is an issue in our country, and we must deal with it in a rational way. And that's what I want to discuss with you today.

I want to thank those folks who are standing behind me for sharing their stories. I will try to do my best to share some of their stories with you. They come from all parts of our country. George Akers, for example, is from Naples. He's here with his boss, who owns the company, a small-business entrepreneur. That would be Naples, Florida. Joe is from Horizon Builders in Maryland. Pam Wimbish is from Illinois. She's self-employed. Rick Bezet is the pastor of the New Life Church in Little Rock, Arkansas. These are people who are working for a living, people who are employing people, people who are worried about health care.

Phil Hadley is, as I told you, is George's boss. He's an entrepreneur. He's a—one of the great parts of America is the entrepreneurial spirit of our country. The fact that small businesses are vibrant and alive is an important part of the economic recovery of our country. After all, most new jobs are created by small-business owners, people who are dreamers and hard workers. But Phil told me he's worried about making sure his employees are covered by good health care.

Lynn Martins is with us. She's a restaurant owner. She is selling food and, at the same

time, worried about whether or not the people that are waiting the tables can get insurance.

The Sameses are with us, Krista and Ted. They're self-employed. By the way, Kris is a home-schooler; she home-schools her children. And they've decided to do something about the high cost of health care by taking an innovative approach to buying health care, which I'm going to describe to you here in a minute.

Anyway, thank you all for coming. These are—their stories are typical stories. Their stories are the stories that occur every day in America as people make decisions about how to allocate money toward health care.

Fortunately, the positive news is that we've got the best health care system in the world. And we need to keep it that way. We need to keep it that way by keeping the private market strong, by resisting efforts that are happening in Washington, DC, to say the Federal Government should be running health care. See, we don't believe that. I don't believe it. I believe the best health care system is that health care system generated in the private markets.

And the best way to keep the private markets strong is to make sure we've got the best research and development, is to make sure the doctor-patient relationship is strong, is to empower consumers to make more choices, is to give them more opportunities to make choices in the private sector.

We're making progress in terms of the modernization of the health care system, starting with the Medicare bill that was passed. The Medicare bill said we have an obligation to our seniors in our country, and we need to fulfill that obligation. And for the first time since Medicare was founded, I had the honor of signing a bill that modernizes the system, which essentially says there needs to be prescription drug coverage for seniors; there needs to be preventive care available for seniors; and seniors need to be given options to choose from, to tailor a program that best meets their needs. The Medicare bill is a vital part of a vibrant health care system. I was proud to sign it, and any attempt by Congress to weaken it will meet my veto.

One of the ways to help make sure health care functions better is to help people who